

## ZAPATA AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

EMILIANO ZAPATA was born in the hamlet of San Miguel Anenecuilo, near the village of Ayala in the state of Morelos at the time when Don Porfirio Diaz was the self-elected ruler of Mexico.

The village lay near the Hacienda of Chinameca where powerful landowners lived. Every year this Hacienda swallowed up a little more of the common lands that the villagers had held ever since anyone could remember, the common lands on which the common people, Indians like Emiliano, grew their crops.

The land was good land, rich land, and the sugar planters needed it to grow their crops too. There was water there and sugar needs plenty of water, so, it was necessary to get the Indians off. Not all at once, but a little at a time, so that they wouldn't notice it quite so much.

When this was accomplished the Indian would have no land, no work, no food for his wife and children. But the rich land-owners could find him plenty of work on their plantations. Wages? Well as there wasn't any other work the Indian would be glad to have a job at all. So he would work for just his keep, but not too much keep, or he would get lazy and not work as hard as he should. The Indian would never work for the sugar planter if he had his own land so they stole his land and shot him if he protested, and that, as they say, was that.

After a time all of the land in Morelos was owned by eleven very rich families most of whom lived in Mexico City. The simple country people believing in justice (for had they not had a revolution in the days of Benito Juarez for land and freedom?) decided to send a delegation to the big city to see Don Porfirio (who was himself an Indian, and had fought with Juarez the great liberator). He would understand their problems and the law would make the rich men give back the land that they had stolen.

But when they arrived at the Presidential Palace who should be there with Don Porfirio? Why, those very rich men who had stolen the land. The villagers told Don Porfirio of their problem and he listened intently. Then he told them that he would see about it. They must go back to their village and the law would take its course, it would take time, but they must be patient. So they went back to the village and they waited and waited and waited, but nothing happened. After a very long wait they decided to hire lawyers and though this was very expensive they put what little they had together to pay the fees. The lawyers took their money but they never got the land, all they got was promises. So the Indians were finally left with no land and no money, and no one who would speak for them, and they went to work on the plantations for their keep.

Cutting sugar-cane is hard work, and the hours were long, and the Indians were not helped by the fact that they were living on a starvation diet of tortillas and beans. The Indians tended to die prematurely, and, when a man lay dying he would tell his sons, 'You must get the land back'.

Young Emiliano probably started to work on the Hacienda too, but at an early age he and his brother, Eufemio, decided that this life was not for them. They stole guns and became highwaymen, spending their time relieving the rich of their valuables instead of adding to them.

In the year 1900 the two brothers were caught by the police. If this had not happened the story would have been quite different, they would probably have gone on being small-time criminals hunted by the police and being known to nobody. They were given a choice (justice was rough in those days)—join the army, or be shot. They joined the army. They spent ten years in the Mexican army and then they were released by one of those mass let-outs they sometimes have in Latin countries to celebrate



something or other.

Just after Emiliano came out of the army things began to happen on the political scene in Mexico. For the first time since Don Porfirio had come to power there were to be opposition parties at the elections. The liberals (who were very progressive in those days) put up a candidate in Morelos. But he didn't get in, in spite of the fact that most of the people had voted for him. Probably some of the votes got lost during the count. After the election those who had worked for the liberal had to leave town, as they say, in a hurry, and along with some others, went the two brothers.

### Francisco Madero

They went up into the hills, where they probably took to banditry again and, by 1911, when the real rising began, they had quite a large group under their command. This rising was

led by one of the men from the big city, a lawyer, whose name was Francisco Madero.

In the film *Viva Zapata* a very good point was brought out about Madero. An emissary came from him looking for Zapata, and he told the brothers that he had come from Francisco Madero, the 'leader' of the revolution, who is in Texas. Eufemio says, 'What is he doing in Texas? The revolution is here.' This was the situation in those days, the poor did the fighting and the rich did the talking (as is always the case). Francisco Madero was a good man, but a soft man. The fighting was done by the Zapatas, the Obregons, and the Villas. Madero arrived in triumph when it was all over.

Madero was of the upper class and did not understand the common people. He believed in things like the freedom of the press and democratic elections, but the people just wanted the land.

As Zapata once said, 'What is the good of the press being free if the nation cannot read?' Madero had good intentions but he was of the city and therefore was a believer in the law. But the only law in Mexico was the law of the gun, and the Hacienda owners had private armies to enforce the law, and to see that the peasants obeyed it. He was a bungler, he had no luck, he was a man doomed to fail.

He was regarded at first as a Christ-figure, who had come to save the people from the slavery of the old regime. They flocked to his banner in their thousands and Don Porfirio saw that it was no use trying to fight. He left the country as fast as he could. He had little or no support. The men who had put him in power were dead and gone, and their sons were spending the money that their fathers' peons earned on French mistresses and gambling and could not be bothered to come back from abroad until it was too late.

## General Zapata

By this time Zapata was in command of a large body of troops fighting in the army of Madero. He was in fact virtual leader of the army in the southern half of the country. His crack troops known as the 'Death Legion' were quite well armed and mounted and were probably the best soldiers in the revolution. The banner they carried was of curious design, the virgin of Guadalupe mounted on a skull and cross-bones.

This army was already calling itself 'the zapatistas' and one of its chief weapons was the stick of dynamite. This was lit by holding the bare fuse against a lighted cigar, the holder getting rid of it as soon as possible.

Zapata intended to take Don Porfirio before he could make good his escape, but the town of Cuauhtla lay in his path held by troops still loyal to the old regime. The city was taken by Zapata, but not before the old man had escaped. There is a description of the taking of the fortress in H. D. Dunn's book *The Crimson Jester* . . . 'Seven small boys, fourteen or fifteen years' old loitered in the plaza. Chasing each other they crossed this little park and began playing in the wide street in front of the barracks. All of them lighted black cigars from one match. They spread out, one remaining before the open door, three on each side running or playing leap-frog away from him. The guards watched idly. Suddenly the little fellows reached inside their ragged shirts, they withdrew small bright objects, like tin cans, with strings dangling from them. The boys touched the string to their lighted cigars and hurled them through the windows of the barracks. A section of the roof rose into the air. The great door leaned forwards, split down the middle and collapsed into the street. The two guards disappeared, one second they were there, the next they were gone in the space of a heartbeat. Fragments of other men came through the doorway, and at the same moment the "zapatistas" swept into the plaza. Yelling, shooting, shouting, "Viva Zapata" . . . "Death to the whites" and other such things, they cut any of the garrison that attempted to fight, to shreds.'

The commander of the garrison was shot on the spot and the soldiers were given the choice of joining the 'zapatistas' or being shot. Most of them joined, the others were shot. After this all the bankers and businessmen in the town were shot and their money confiscated.

The policy of the 'zapatistas' seemed to be one of Indian nationalism. If you were a foreigner they left you alone, unless you were a Spaniard, or of Spanish descent. If you were Spanish you were killed without mercy. The Indians had been treated by the Spaniards in virtually the same way as the Jews by Hitler. They had been a well-fed people (at least) before the

Spaniards came. Now every part of the old way of life had gone, and there was nothing but starvation in its place.

If people have their way of life destroyed they tend to get annoyed about it. These Indians had never heard of pacifism, they were very cruel, because they had been treated very cruelly. Exploiters who fell into their hands were often tortured in bestial ways, but to quote again from *The Crimson Jester* . . . 'The Indians were not the kind of people to watch men suffer.' Zapata would have some villain staked out on an ant hill, but no one waited to hear his screams. They just left him, forgot him. Perhaps they thought the punishment fitted the crime, who knows?

## Land for the Indian

Before Madero became President, Zapata, with others, drew up a kind of charter. It called for the expulsion of the planters from Mexico and the return of the land to the Indian. When one says, 'The return of the land to the Indian', what does one mean? It could mean collectivism or communism, or again it could mean that the land should revert back to jungle and that no one should work the sugar plantations. These should disappear and a man would harvest his crops and move on to another place, as they had done before the white men came.

If this is what they wanted, and I rather fancy it was, they certainly got it. The large plantations were broken up or fell into disuse. Much of the land returned to the jungle where the Indian wandered free, living well sometimes, and starving at others, like the old days.

Everyone signed the charter and it was taken to the big city and printed in the newspaper. Madero, who by this time was President, could now show that Zapata and his child-like Indian army were fools and could get on with the business of governing the country and getting back to normal; balancing the budget and so on. He had in actual fact, simply taken the place of Don Porfirio without realising it. Of course things were better. There was freedom of speech but the lawyers still ruled and the Hacienda owners settled down once again after the shouting had died down. Things must change so that they can remain the same.

The Indians soon began to realise that nothing had happened. Their charter had been printed in the paper but no one had taken any further notice. There can be no doubt that as soon as Madero asked them to give up their weapons and disband, any trust they had in him melted away like butter in the sun.

The Indians were ignorant, illiterate, but they were not completely stupid. A mistake many people in this world make is to trust in education. 'Education is what is wanted', we are told again and again but, if you are a crooked politician, you can tell people that you are taking their livelihood because they are standing in the way of progress. They must give up something for the good of the majority. An appeal is made to their patriotism and often they are suckers, but if you take a man's land who knows nothing of economics, he knows that he wants it back and he will kill to get it back.

So this was the case in Mexico. The lawyers had taken the land and the Indians wanted it back. If they could plant their crops and harvest them it was their land and if they couldn't it was stolen from them. The Indian knew where his wealth lay, and he didn't need a politician or lawyer to tell him.

So when Madero came down to see Zapata and said that his army must disband and hand in their rifles so that the reconstruction could take place, a very cute trick was played on him by these child-like Indians. The Indians were to file past a reviewing stand, receive their twenty pesos and throw their rifles onto a heap.

As each man got his note he threw away his gun, an old and useless gun, strolled round the corner and down the street to a warehouse, where he picked up another old and useless gun and fell in line again to receive another twenty pesos and to throw that gun away too.

This was repeated until there were no more useless guns left. The men still had their arms and 60 pesos each. How they must have laughed over that.

## Madero's Death

Madero must have been very afraid of Zapata at this time because he promised him the earth to disband his army. Emiliano was given the rank of General in the federal army. Each 'zapatista' was to receive 20 pesos and his choice of land in Morelos

or Guerrero as well as farming implements and animals. When the heat is on, a man will make many promises.

As Madero sought to pacify his old enemies in the ruling classes, the men who had fought for him became restless and scattered revolts kept breaking out again. Madero had been found wanting, and some of his best officers turned against him.

Three of these men joined the 'zapatistas' and began training the men ready for battle. They had given Madero plenty of time to act, and he had done nothing. The army of the south decided to raise the standard of revolt. Zapata himself voted against rebellion but was outvoted by the others. He accepted the democratic principle.

Before this happened however, Madero was already doomed. Taft was president of the United States of America and he had no time for Madero's liberalism. Things had been quieter in the old days under Don Porfirio and he didn't want a state of chaos over the border. So he placed an embargo on arms going into Mexico and thereby prevented Madero's loyal troops from putting down the revolts.

Suddenly Madero was arrested. Taking advantage of all the chaos in the country the army staged a coup d'état under the leadership of Victoriano Huerta.

On February 18, 1913, Lieutenant-Colonel Riverole went to the palace and presented the senate's demand that Madero should resign. Madero listened to him calmly, then, drawing a revolver, shot him dead. Another officer who rushed in was shot by his

become soldiers and he was no exception. He no doubt wanted to give Morelos back to the sugar planters and stabilize the economic life of the country, but he couldn't get off the ground, for he had too many enemies.

The trouble came from three main groups, Zapata in the south, Pancho Villa in the north, and Carranza. Zapata we have described as an Indian nationalist; Villa was a revolutionary of very doubtful type (he has been described as a madman, pervert, Robin Hood, liar, sadist, bullying coward, simple and honest), he's very difficult to nail down; Carranza was just another politician but more of a liar than most. His men called him the first chief and his enemies called him the first thief.

In the midst of this impossible chaos Huerta gave up. He left by boat for Spain. He was placed under arrest six months later by the Americans for trying to lead an army over the border back into Mexico. By this time Carranza was the President but the same state of chaos continued, with armies marching up and down the country looting and pillaging wherever they went. During the years from 1911-18 this became the way of life. Men fought for one side then another, changing their coats as the political wind changed.

Zapata and Villa finally got together and drove Carranza from the Presidential Palace. There was very little fighting because 'the cockroaches', as Carranza's troops were called, simply fled at the approach of the two peasant armies. So Zapata and Villa met in the capital, shook hands and had their photographs



aide. Madero, like a man demented, rushed from the room shouting that he was the president and ran straight into the arms of soldiers who were on their way to arrest him. He was promptly disarmed and placed in a cell. Later, someone killed him.

So ended the life of a man, who a mere two years before had been hailed as a Christ by the people of Mexico. When he had arrived in the big city people had run forward to kiss his hand. Now hardly anyone cared that he was dead.

## Revolution again

Victoriano Huerta was now in the saddle, but the horse was impossible to control. He probably wanted to get things back to the situation under Don Porfirio, a place for everyone and everyone in his place. Most soldiers like order; that is why they

taken. But Zapata did not like the capital and stayed outside in his armoured train most of the time. Villa on the other hand, now he had arrived, lived it up with his men.

While the revolutionaries were there they made rather a mess of the country club. They stabled their horses in the ballroom. They had, you see, no idea how the more polite section of society lived. They turned another great house where they stayed into a midden, chopping great chunks out of the highly polished parquet floors. 'We slipped walking across,' they explained. They also used the library books for unmentionable purposes, but then, they couldn't read them could they?

The US Government began to put pressure on Carranza to try to do something to stop the chaos. He called a convention to settle the fate of the country but tried to avoid having Zapata there. Villa however insisted that his old friend was allowed and so the three factions all sent delegates.

## Power

The convention gave the actual power to Zapata and Villa jointly but of course the country was in a dreadful state and nothing could be done to end the chaos. All they could do was bring about a little order and fair play in Mexico City itself. You could only rule what you controlled in Mexico at that time.

Suddenly the position changed once again through the attitude north of the border. Villa was in control of the northern part of the country. Chihuahua was his state, and this bordered on the USA. Villa had promised the American general Scott that he would pacify Mexico. Wilson lifted the arms embargo and supplies of arms (including some small field-pieces) flooded into the army of Pancho Villa.

Neither Zapata or Villa ever seemed to want to be the President of Mexico but their man (Gutierrez) certainly did.

After a time however he changed sides and became Carranza's man and the seemingly endless chaos started all over again. Carranza marched on Mexico City with thirty thousand men, Obregon, who had come to some agreement with him, with ten thousand. Villa retreated north and Zapata, left alone, had to pull out and go south. Carranza was back in the palace. He sent Obregon north to do battle with Villa, and Zapata immediately returned and took some of the city back again. Driven off, he continued to fight a guerrilla war against the government. By now, this had become a battle against the government (whatever government) because none of them gave land to the people.

This kind of tactic caused Carranza to call another convention (this time he excluded the 'zapatistas') and another president was elected. This one didn't last very long. He quietly left one day taking a large amount of the funds with him.

## Alone

Zapata suddenly attacked and captured Mexico City while most of Carranza's best troops were away looking for Villa. Very soon after this, these same troops, under Obregon, met and defeated Villa at the battle of Leon scattering his army to the four winds.

Zapata was alone, but in the capital. He made a proclamation telling the poor to take whatever they wanted from those who had been keeping them in poverty. They took him at his word and the houses of the rich were sacked and burned. Churches were burned too. The gold in them was turned over to a kind of national pawnshop which lent money to those in need. Payments were made in gold for the first time in years.

Foreigners were protected, as was their property. Zapata became a great favourite with Americans living in the city because he protected them from excesses. When Carranza had been in the palace people had been shot in the street for the contents of their wallets, women were raped, it was bedlam. Now things were at least a little better. Zapata wanted the land, he may have been a bandit but he stood for something real.

Colonel Morales, who had been with Zapata a long time and was one of the ex-professional soldiers, told him to fall back from the capital. 'Retreat,' he said, 'Villa is defeated and you cannot fight them all.'

So Zapata's army fell back once again to its homeland in Morelos leaving the capital to fall to the allies of Carranza.

Another peace conference was called and Emiliano was invited but he declined. He had evidently come to the conclusion that all these conferences were just an excuse for betrayal. He was quite right because the defeated Pancho Villa's name was on the list calling for the conference. He had, for the moment at least, gone over to the other side. The conference had to be postponed this time because Carranza could not be sure that things were safe. He didn't really have enough troops handy to be sure of holding Zapata.

When his allies had come back from up north it was a different story and the 'zapatistas' found themselves attacked from all sides. Obregon having made a truce with Villa had turned back south, and the 'cockroaches' were coming from the east. Gonzalez, another general, had got round behind them. Morales and a body of men succeeded in holding back the 'cockroaches' while the main body of the army fought its way out, as they succeeded in crushing Gonzalez, most of Morales' men got away too.

When they were safe for the moment, Zapata heard that he had been betrayed by one of his half-breed officers. He immediately reduced not only his half-breed officers to the ranks, but

all the Indian ones that did not come from Morelos or Guerrero.

They set about strengthening their position in Morelos, as they were now on the defensive, waiting to be attacked. Shortly after this the 'zapatistas' captured a money train (rather like the Great Train Robbers) and took millions in Carranza notes. They gave these to Indians who could take them into territory controlled by Carranza and spend them.

In spite of small successes such as this Emiliano Zapata's back was to the wall. He still controlled Morelos but his enemies were all about him. Morelos had been free since 1911 and the people of that state were willing to try to preserve that freedom, but the rest of the country wanted peace. The 'zapatistas' had driven out the parasites wherever they went but they always came back, so what was the point?

## The End

It was 1918 and General Gonzalez sent a force under the command of Colonel Jesus Guajardo to take a certain town near the 'zapatistas' base. He sent a message to General Zapata telling him that he wished to come over and join his army. Emiliano smelled a rat, but the colonel had been with Villa before he had been defeated by Obregon so he might be all right. He may have done this to save his skin and now he was in the clear wished to change back again. So Zapata set him a test. Several of his men had been guilty of crimes of robbery and rape and he told the colonel that he wanted them shot. The colonel had the men shot, 150 of them. Even so, Zapata was uneasy but the men and guns were very badly needed and he agreed to go and meet the colonel and arrange terms.

This is supposed to be an eye-witness account of what happened. 'Guajardo was at Jonocatepec, which place he claimed to have captured from Carranzista troops under Pablo Gonzalez. When we heard this our General Zapata gave orders that a letter should be taken to Guajardo telling him we would meet him in Telpazingo. He was to come to meet the chief with only thirty men and General Zapata would have thirty men also. The chief ordered his men to retire and taking only thirty, went to Telpazingo. We waited for Colonel Guajardo, who arrived at four in the afternoon, not with thirty men but with six hundred cavalry-men and a machine-gun.

General Zapata went out to meet him and they embraced. 'Colonel I congratulate you,' our chief said smiling.

At 10 p.m. we left Telpazingo for Chinameca and stayed the night at a place called 'the duck pond'. At about 8 a.m. we went down to Chinameca. The chief had about 150 men who had come to Telpazingo to join him. These men were drawn up in the plaza while the chief and the colonel went to discuss plans.

Suddenly there came word that an enemy force was drawing near. The chief ordered Colonel Jose Rodriguez of his escort to go and scout in the direction of Santa Rita. As they were leaving Colonel Guajardo came up saying, 'General Zapata, you give the orders. Shall I send cavalry or infantry?' 'Send infantry for the plain is very broken up,' the chief replied.

We went back to the Hacienda of Chinameca after watching the plain for a while. We could see no enemy troops in sight. The chief had sent Colonel Palazios to talk to Guajardo and he asked to see him. The chief was invited to go into the Hacienda and he leapt on his horse, a horse that had been presented to him the very day before by Guajardo. 'Let only ten men come with me,' he said.

The rest of us lay in the shade, our rifles stacked, confidently we waited. The guard drawn up at the gate made as if to do him the honours. The bugle sounded the salute and just as he reached the gate, the soldiers, who were presenting arms, suddenly, without warning, took aim and fired, and our General Zapata fell, never to rise again. Morales died at the same time, and Palazios must have been assassinated inside the Hacienda. The surprise was terrible. Suddenly all the soldiers that Guajardo had hidden began firing from all around. We did not have a chance. This was the tragedy, this was how the perfidious Guajardo betrayed the noble confidence of our chief. So died Emiliano Zapata, so die all brave men, men of honour, when their enemies, unable to defeat them any other way, resort to treason and crime.'

So the great agrarian leader was dead. His brother managed to escape and was last heard of fighting as an officer in a revolutionary army in Nicaragua.

The Carranza government paid Colonel Jesus Guajardo 100,000 pesos for the murder of Emiliano Zapata. Three months later

he was shot by the same government, for treason, or so they said. Carranza was fleeing Mexico City two years later, with much of the money from the treasury, when he was overtaken and killed. Obregon was shot dead in Mexico City and Pancho Villa was murdered a few years later. Eventually the Mexican revolution fizzled out leaving things perhaps a little better for the common people, perhaps not.

Zapata has become a legend among the Indians. His ghost rides the trails of Morelos they say, scattering silver pesos for his people the Indians. A million songs have been written telling of his glorious victories. Statuettes of him are made lovingly in clay mounted on his horse, machete in hand.

He found Mexico enslaved. He left nearly one-third of Mexico free, and with all of it inspired with the idea of freedom to live as one chooses. His victories have grown hollow now. Governments have come and gone. The Indian has dropped into a sleep of hopelessness, but once there was hope, and he

provided it.

Some of the changes he brought lasted a long time. Tens of thousands of public papers, deeds, property transfers, titles, mortgages, marriage certificates, birth certificates, death certificates, records and maps were destroyed in the belief that if these things were destroyed the land would be free for the Indian. This belief was true for some time at least.

Titles to more than 500 Haciendas had been destroyed. Their terrain is occupied, but not cultivated, by three or four million Indians.

He was a far from perfect man but he did more for the Mexican Indian than all the liberals before, or since. He was a peasant who knew what his people wanted and tried to get it for them, and, in the end gave his life for them.

JACK STEVENSON.

(Text of a talk given to LAG.)



Emiliano Zapata, dead, in the Cuautla police station, April 10, 1919

# ZAPATA'S MANIFESTO

MANIFESTO TO MEXICANS, issued by Emiliano Zapata and signed by him and thirty-five officers, August, 1914.

THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT has reached its culminating point, and it is time, therefore, for the country to know the truth.

The existing Revolution did not make itself for the purpose of satisfying the interests of any one personality, of any one group or of any one party. The existing revolution recognizes that its origins lie deeper and that it is pursuing higher finalities.

The peasant was hungry, was enduring misery, was suffering from exploitation, and if he rose in arms it was to obtain the bread the greed of the rich denied him, to make himself master of the land the egoistic landed proprietor kept for himself, to vindicate the dignity the slave-driver iniquitously trampled on daily. He threw himself into revolt, not to conquer illusory political rights which do not feed him, but to procure for himself the piece of land which must supply him with food and liberty, a happy fireside and a future of independence and growth.

They make a lamentable mistake who suppose that the establishment of a military government, that is to say, a despotic government, will ensure the pacification of the country. It can be obtained only by the realization of the double operation of reducing to impotence the elements of the ancient regime and creating new interests linked inextricably with the Revolution, solidaric with it, in danger if it is in danger and prosperous if it becomes established and consolidated.

The first task, that of making it impossible for the reactionary group to be any longer a danger, is carried out by two different methods; by the exemplary punishment of the chiefs, of the great criminals, of the intellectual directors and active elements of the conservative faction, and by attacking the pecuniary resources they employ to work up intrigues and provoke revolutions; that is to say, by the subdivision of the properties of the hacienda owners and politicians who have put themselves at the front of the organized resistance to the popular movement which began in 1910 and has attained its crowning point in 1914, after surviving the gallows of Ciudad Juarez and the reactionary crisis of the Ciudadela, a tragedy let loose by the Huerta dictatorship.

This subdivision is aided by the fact that the greater part, not to say the whole, of the cultivable lands to be nationalized represents interests created under the shadow of the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship, inflicting grave injury on the rights of a multitude of natives, small proprietors and victims of all kinds, who were sacrificed brutally on the altars of the ambitions of the powerful.

The second task, that of creating powerful interests akin to the Revolution and in solidarity with it, will be brought to a happy conclusion when the natives, individually and in their communities, receive back the innumerable tracts of land of which they have been despoiled by the great landowners; and this great act of justice receives its complement, as regards those who have nothing and have had nothing, in the proportional repartition of the lands given to the dictatorship's accomplices or of those expropriated from idle proprietors who do not choose to cultivate their heritages. Thus there will be satisfied both the human demand for land and that appetite for liberty which is making itself felt throughout the Republic as the formidable reply to the savagery of the hacienda owners which has maintained, even in the twentieth century and in the heart of free America, a system which the most unfortunate serfs of the Middle Ages in Europe would hardly have endured.

The Plan of Ayala, which translates and incarnates the peasants' ideals, satisfies both terms of the problem, for, while it treats the sworn enemies of the people as they deserve to be treated, reducing them by expropriation to impotence and innocuousness, it establishes, in articles 6 and 7, the two great principles of the return of stolen lands (an act of imperious justice) and the splitting-up of the expropriated cultivable lands (an act required alike by justice and expediency). . . .

It is certain that the deluded believe that the country is going to be contented (as it was not contented in 1910) with an electoral pantomime, from which are to arise new and apparently honest men who are to occupy the curule chairs, the seats in the Legis-

lature, and the Presidency's lofty throne; but they who judge the matter thus appear to ignore the fact that the country, during the crisis of the last few years, has reaped a harvest of lessons it never can forget, which will not permit it to lose its road, and has acquired a profound understanding of the causes of ill-being and the way to combat them. . . .

The country . . . wishes to break, once and for all, with the feudal epoch, which is now an anachronism. It wishes to destroy with one stroke the relationships of lord and serf, overseer and slave, which, in the matter of agriculture, are the only ones ruling from Tamaulipas to Chiapas and from Sonora to Yucatan.

The country people wish to live the life of civilization; to breathe the air of economic liberty which as yet they have not known; and this they never can do while there still remains on foot the traditional lord of the scaffold and the knife, who disposes at whim of the persons of his labourers; an extortioneer of wages, who annihilates them with excessive tasks, brutalizes them by misery and ill treatment, dwarfs and exhausts his race by the slow agony of slavery and the enforced withering of human beings whose stomachs and empty brains are very hungry.

First, a military and then a parliamentary government, with administrative reforms, that the reorganization may be able to last; ideal purity in the management of the public funds; official responsibilities scrupulously exacted; liberty of the press, for those who do not know how to write; liberty to vote, for those to whom the candidates are unknown; the correct administration of justice for those who never will employ a lawyer—all these democratic prettinesses, all these fine words in which our grandfathers and fathers took such delight, have lost today their magic attraction and significance to the people. The people have seen that with elections and without them, with suffrage and without it, with the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz and with the democracy of Madero, with the press gagged and with the press given the fullest liberty, always and in all circumstances it has still to chew the cud of its bitter lot, to endure its miseries, to swallow humiliations that know no end. For this reason, and with abundantly good cause, it fears that the liberators of today may prove themselves like the leaders of yesterday, who whittled away at Ciudad Juarez their beautiful radicalism, and in the National Palace forgot all about their seductive promises.

Therefore the Agrarian Revolution, distrusting chiefs who are looking for their own triumph, has adopted, as a precaution and as a guarantee, the most just rule that the revolutionary leaders of all the country shall be the ones to choose the first magistrate as Provisional President, charged with the duty of calling the elections; for it knows well that on the Provisional President depends the future of the Revolution and, along with that, the fate of the Republic.

What could be more just than that all those interested—the chiefs of the groups engaged in the fight, the representatives of the people in arms—should agree in the selection of the functionary in whose hands there must be placed the tabernacle of the Revolution's promises, the sacred ark of the people's aspirations? Why should the so-called Constitutionalists fear the crucible of revolutionary revision or shrink from rendering tribute to the democratic principle that the candidate should be discussed freely by those interested?

Any other method of procedure will be not only disloyal but dangerous, for the Mexican people has shaken off its indifference, has recovered its courage and will not be the one to allow others to erect their own government on its back.

There is still time to reflect and avoid the conflict. If the Leader of the Constitutionalists considers that he has the popularity needed to stand the proof of its submission to a vote of the revolutionaries, let him submit to it without vacillation; and if the Constitutionalists truly love the people and understand what they demand, let them do homage to its sovereign will, accepting with sincerity and without any reticences the Plan of Ayala—expropriation of the lands for the sake of public utility, expropriation of the property of the people's enemies, and restitution to the towns and communities of the domains of which they have been despoiled.

If that is not done they may rest assured that the agitation of the masses will continue, that the war will go on in Morelos,

in Guerrero, in Puebla, in Oaxaca, in Mexico, in Tlaxcala, in Michoacan, in Hidalgo, in Guanuato, in San Luis Potosi, in Tamaulipas, in Durango, in Zacatecas, in Chihuahua, wherever there are lands redivided or to be redivided, and the great movement of the South, supported by all the country population of the Republic, will continue until, conquering all opposition and combating all resistance, it shall finally have snatched, by the hands of its powder-blackened warriors, the lands which its false liberators have undertaken to keep from it.

The Agrarian Revolution, calumniated by the enemy's press, un-

recognised by Europe, understood with great exactitude by the diplomacy of North America and yet viewed with little interest by its sister nations of South America, lifts on high the banner of its ideals, that those who have been deceived may see it, and that it may be contemplated by the egoists and the perverse, by those who deafen their ears to the lamentations of the suffering people, to the cries of mothers who have lost their sons, and to the enraged shouts of the strugglers—the strugglers who do not wish to see, and who will not see, their aspirations for liberty and their glorious dreams of redemption for their people brought to naught.

# A Practical Anarchist

**REVOLUTION MEXICO 1910-20** by Ronald Atkin, Macmillan, 63/-.

**ZAPATA & THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION** by J. Womack Jnr., Thames & Hudson, 84/-.

**R**EVOLUTION MEXICO is really a book for beginners. The author has appeared to have done his homework on most of the books that have been written on the subject in English, but for someone who is looking to find out something fresh about this complex subject the book has very little to offer. It is quite well written from the point of view of being very easy to read, in fact I read it very quickly. But it says little or nothing that has not been said before. In reading this book one has the thought that almost anyone with a middling knowledge of the subject could have done it as well.

Very little is said of the great guerilla leader of the south compared with the pages and pages that are spent in describing the exploits of the romantic figure of Francisco Villa, leader of the peasant army of the north. This is hardly surprising because Villa was campaigning just over the border from Texas and one could quite easily stand on United States territory and watch his army launch one of their famous *Golpe terrorico's* or visit him in his camp and talk to either Villa himself or, if you didn't speak Spanish, to one of the American mercenaries who were fighting for him.

We are told of Zapata's Plan of Ayala, of his death and of the fact that he liked flashy clothes, horses and women. He is not a romantic figure like 'Pancho' Villa who in fact seemed to behave as if he was playing himself in a western film. From reading this book no one could possibly exaggerate Villa's romantic image and the parts played by Hollywood actors are but pale watered-down images of the real thing. Villa was a crack shot, in fact it is said in the book that though he was surrounded by scoundrels no one dared to try their luck with him because if you didn't kill him with the first shot you wouldn't get a chance of a second. Perhaps he was really the fastest gun in the west. Villa was a great attraction because he was, by the sound of him, a manic-depressive of the first water and therefore a wonderful bogeyman to wave at the American middle-classes of the time.

All the way through the book we can see how American (US) interference played a great part in deciding the outcome of things. Sometimes it was a good thing and sometimes a bad.

The main trouble about *Revolution Mexico* is that the author seems to fall into the same trap as so many others who have written of these troubled times. He has been carried away by the romance of the thing. The issues were very black and white at the time. You were either on the side of the simple noble Indian who was fighting for the right to farm his own land in the same way as his ancestors had done or you thought that these unwashed 'dagos' were standing in the way of progress and were their own worst enemies and had to be removed. So one never reads a book where the author doesn't take sides, but in this the author, Ronald Atkin, has really tried to do his best and this is the least biased book I can remember reading on the subject.

## Morelos Destroyed

The war which started as a revolution for the bringing about of democracy degenerated into a racial struggle between the Indians on the one hand and the politicians and landowners on the other. Terrible crimes were committed from the destroying

of the entire state of Morelos to the crucifixion and murder of the Hacienda owners who fell into the hands of the Indians. Whole villages were wiped out by sadistic army officers, Haciendas were burned and laid waste by Indians. The Indians were looked upon as being animals by those who thought they were their betters and treated like animals too. They replied in kind and for years the country was torn to pieces by the opposing factions. Zapata and his Zapatistas were only a small part of this whole and the book dealing as it does with the entire revolution discloses very little of what motivated the agrarian rebels. It is a book about the political side and the romantic side but compared to the second book on the subject . . . *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, it is a schoolboys' guide.

This is easily the finest book that has been written in English about the Zapatistas. It takes in the entire revolution but slants it from the view of Zapata and his people. The book traces Zapata from the time he took over from the local headman in his home village to become the spokesman for the local people, tracing right through to his tragic death and beyond. It shows the kind of man that he was. A strange man, a natural leader who showed no wish to lead at all. A man who gave way again and again to Francisco Madero when he was told to wait and be patient. A man who, after he had completely lost all patience with Madero, could say, 'Tell him this from me, to take off for Havana because if not he can count the days as they go by, and in a month I'll be in Mexico City with twenty thousand men and have the pleasure of going up to Chapultepec Castle and dragging him out of there and hanging him from one of the highest trees in the park.' . . . He still had no wish to be the leader but only wished to retire on a small piece of land with a few horses. Again and again he climbed down before the honeyed words of politicians who promised that the agrarian question would be solved with their mouths while they signed away the Indians' lands with their hands.

After his patience was exhausted by Madero's attempts to be all things to all men, he still had no wish to be the leader of the agrarian revolt and the army of the south spoke of Pascual Orozco as the leader of the revolution until he went over to Huerta. It was only after being betrayed by everyone and the complete destruction of Pancho Villa's armies that he decided to have no truck with any of them and announced, 'They are all a bunch of bastards.' Which was more or less correct.

The Zapatistas were usually behind the times, politically speaking, because they had little idea of what was going on up north. They had little or no money (though they did raise some by running a protection racket with the local rich men) and the way to Villa and Orozco meant going from the coast to Havana, from Havana to New Orleans and from there to Texas and then over the border into Chihuahua which was Villa's domain. After being betrayed by all and sundry Zapata finally came to the conclusion that his people must use their guns to defend their own land and indeed he never wandered very far from Morelos at any time.

## Father of his People

The twists and turns of the politicians of all shades are recorded well in this book and we can very quickly see that no one in the Parliament building in Mexico City had the Indians' interests at heart. So Zapata was forced to become the father of his people, very very reluctantly. The way that this slowly happened is described very well. We hear much more about

the men who surrounded him at this time: Manuel Palafox (later banished as a traitor), Antonio Diaz Soto y Gama (who called himself an anarchist but said that the five greatest men in history were Buddha, Jesus Christ, St. Francis, Karl Marx and Emiliano Zapata, a mixed bunch to say the least), Genovevo de la O (a revolutionary leader who threw in his lot with the Zapatistas), Amador Salazar and Zapata's brother, Eufemio (who, according to this book was shot by another Zapatista when he went off the rails).

Zapata himself said of these men that they took orders from him only because they had a feeling of friendship for him. To the press in Mexico City these men were rubbish (unless they happened to be in Mexico City at the time). Huerta believed that the whole of the countryside was entirely Zapatista and the only way to stamp this out was the mass deportation of thousands of innocent people and the burning of their homes. This was only really brought to an end by the American landing in Vera Cruz when these sadistic and murderous army officers and their men were forced to leave the country to face the new menace.

The great Mexican anarchist of the day and any other day, Ricardo Flores Magon wrote a pamphlet in which he said that Zapata was the only real revolutionary in the revolution and most of the anarchists in Mexico agreed with him. (Magon got himself locked up in jail in the States while campaigning there and died in prison.) But though Zapata took the anarchist line I feel that he was only an anarchist out of necessity. He did want to leave it to others but found that he just couldn't. He was forced to be an anarchist against his will.

Most revolutionaries when faced with the choice of choosing between the people and the state usually put the conquest of the state first and then find themselves having to rule the people, in a very similar way to those, who ruled before, often much to their surprise. Zapata had no hesitation in choosing the people first, last and always. He could have retired to a large *hacienda* and lived on the fat of the land but he chose to be a fugitive and a hunted man rather than do this and we will never really know why.

## 'A Strong People'

The anarchists say that the land should be owned in common by those who work it and the Mexican Indian had this as his normal way of life. In fact he found it difficult, if not impossible, to understand the theory of ownership of land at all. To own the land was like owning the air, it was for everyone to grow his crops on to feed his wife and family. Zapata has been called a communist but he was never that because he did not seek the conquest of the state. He was a communist in the sense that he believed that the land should be held in common but so did lots of groups of people long before there was any idea of socialism or communism or anarchism. He was a practical anarchist, a man who came to anarchism not from choice but from necessity. He learned from bitter experience that 'God helps those who help themselves'.

He tried trusting the well-educated and well-spoken men first, the men who had been to school and trained to talk. They failed him as they fail everyone, because when it comes down to it they are only exercising their minds when they talk of the social problem. It is not their problem, it is the problem of the poor, and only the poor can solve it. This is the anarchist message and this was Zapata's message—'A strong people do not need a government'.

Zapata did not demand very much. But he found, as the poorer section of the world is finding today, that the liberals will talk about helping but they won't actually do anything other than lend money at a good per cent profit to the bastards who are living off of their poverty.

Anarchism does not tell you what it will do for you. It shows you what you could do for yourself. Zapata told his people, 'Hang on to your guns and they can never take the land away from you.' Another famous anarchist (the Spaniard Durruti) said that the rich would destroy everything rather than give it to the workers and this is what the rich did in Morelos. One of the great sugar plantations of the world was destroyed rather than allow the 'nigger' Indians to live like human beings. The message is very very clear.

J.S.

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